

COMMODITY FLOW AND URBAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

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For many years we have been concerned with the problems of transportation in urban areas. The emphasis, however, has been on the difficulties of moving people, and comparatively little attention has been given to the problems of commodity movements in cities. Thus, this conference is a milestone in its recognition of the need for more information and better planning concerning the movement of goods in urban areas.

The final structure of this conference is substantially different from the initial proposals. In the beginning we were primarily concerned with developing techniques and information systems that would forecast the growth of urban commodity movement. The more we delved into the problem, the more we became aware that forecasting models predicated on past historical patterns would not be valid unless they took account of the changes in economic and social patterns occurring in society and the changes in physical structure occurring in cities. The goals of the conference, therefore, were redefined, as follows:

1. To clearly define the issues and alternatives involved in urban goods movement;
2. To synthesize and evaluate the information we already have available relating to urban commodity flow;
3. To consider the economic, social, political, and technological changes that are occurring in the urban environment and that will affect the demand and flow of goods in metropolitan areas; and,
4. To forecast commodity flow.

To advise us on the development of the conference, we invited a number of representatives to a one-day meeting last spring. From the response, it became evident that different groups saw urban goods movement from different points of view. It also appeared that the proposed policies and activities of one group involved with goods movement may be in conflict with those of another group. The discussions also indicated that a wealth of information already exists on the flow of goods in urban areas or, at least, on urban truck movements but that it has not been gathered together or put in a form that is usable by interested parties. Putting all these needs together for a conference program was a milestone in itself.

To understand the current patterns of urban commodity flow and forecast future changes and growth, we must not only consider the current patterns but also examine the reasons for them. To do this we must go beyond the statistics and examine the structure of the freight industry and the effects of government policy on the movement of freight. In addition to looking at the shipping process itself, we must also consider changing patterns and the needs of the shippers and receivers of goods. In our analysis we must include potential technological and procedural innovations that will influence the way we transport goods. We included in the conference program formal papers to address these topics. A panel discussion was arranged to get some perspective of how different ones involved in urban goods movement see the problem.

Five workshop panels were included to consider different facets of commodity flow. The first determined what economic factors affect the location of freight terminals and the collection and distribution of goods. The second considered the needs of a large

urbanized society and reexamined the way goods are moved and the historical attitudes and public policies toward urban goods movement. In the third, the physical structure of the city was considered. Major changes are occurring in cities in response to changes in life styles and economic and social demands. Recent census data indicate that population shifts in urban areas have been more rapid than they were forecast to be. The relocation of population and industrial concentrations dramatically shift the demands for goods shipment. However, there is always a lag between the time problems are perceived and solutions proposed and the time when they are acknowledged by the public and acted upon. In the interim, we must continue to operate under existing constraints and with existing facilities. The fourth workshop directed its attention toward applying existing knowledge and technology to the achievement of maximum efficiency in the movement of goods. The fifth workshop panel attempted to develop a framework for analyzing and forecasting commodity flow.

Considerations during the conference and summarized in this Special Report will be submitted to the U. S. Secretary of Transportation and the Canadian Ministry of Transport. In addition, this Special Report will be given wide international distribution.

To some degree, public policy in the area of urban goods movement in the past has been formulated with little reliance on the logical application of researched facts. Before sound public decisions are made, it is imperative that well-authenticated facts are produced by a thorough examination of the background of public issues and the consequences of proposed alternatives by a wide range of interested professionals. This conference provided one of the first opportunities to share information, points of view, and insights useful in the development of better practices in the area of urban goods movement.